

For ESL Students, Project-Based Learning Builds Up Confidence, Breaks Down Inhibitions

February 7, 2017

The New School

When Ladya Cheryl, a native Indonesian speaker, was assigned to go out into the city and talk to strangers in English, she was a little **apprehensive**.

“I have problems with self-confidence, especially when I communicate in English, so it was very difficult for me at first,” Cheryl, a former English as a Second Language (ESL) student, recalls of an assignment for Tamara Kirson’s Listening-Speaking class.

However, after tackling the assignment — designing a guide to farm-to-table restaurants and leading a video-recorded discussion on it with members of the New School and New York City communities — she felt **empowered** to speak up.

“I’m glad I could finally overcome my fears,” says Cheryl, who has since enrolled as a film studies student.

Cheryl is one of the many ESL students who have participated in Project-Based Learning (PBL) in The New School’s Intensive English Program. A reflection of the university’s collaborative, real-world educational approach, PBL gives ESL students the opportunity to practice their English language skills in the creation of multimedia explorations of culture, social customs, and more — an experience that **builds up** their confidence and **breaks down** their inhibitions.

“As language learners engage in PBL, they gain autonomy and lower the emotional barrier to learning,” says Tamara Kirson, project development advisor for the Intensive English Program. “PBL enables our students to build their research capabilities; enhance their skills in collaboration, creativity, and communication; and self-direct as they explore their roles in the academic community and the community at large.”

In the most recent series of PBL assignments, students in The New School’s ESL classes created a **variety** of projects — restaurant guides, podcasts, plays, magazines, music, and art pieces — exploring food studies, relationships, and literature. In Open Sesame, Cheryl and her classmates designed a guide to farm-to-table restaurants and led a video-recorded

discussion on it with members of the New School community. The project not only helped Cheryl hone her English-language skills but also exposed her to the culinary community and culture.

“This experience gave me the chance to learn more about food and the people who work in the environment and to expand my food vocabulary,” she says. “Through this experience, my English improved unexpectedly.”

Other PBL video projects included The Game Gathering, in which students from Kirson’s Listening-Speaking class enlisted audience members to play food-inspired board games they designed, and Crossroads and Crosswords, in which students from the same class presented maquettes of food trucks they visited and invited audience members to try their hand at related crossword puzzles.

The projects also encompassed podcasts, playwriting, and magazines. In their “R Wave FM” podcasts, high-intermediate students in Michelle Kaplan’s Listening-Speaking class researched and shared their views on human relationships, while students in Jessica Coyle’s advanced Listening-Speaking class wrote and performed a play, *Untitled Symphony*, in which they explored conflicts and conflict resolution. Students in Jessica Duke’s Listening-Speaking class created online magazines relating *Alice in Wonderland* to their lives, while students in Roshii Jolly’s Listening-Speaking class presented their designs for food trucks.

PBL assignments differ greatly in medium and content. **However**, they all share requisite elements: focus on a question or problem, sustained inquiry, authenticity, student voice and choice, reflection, critique and revision, and a public product. **What’s more**, they all help prepare students for the next stage of their academic and professional careers.

“In film study, I need the courage to stand up in front of my new classmates and share my experiences,” Cheryl says. “This is my first time studying abroad. I never knew that learning could be so compelling.”

Before reading:

In groups, answer the following questions:

1. Before you started taking ESL classes at Grossmont College, what were your feelings about being a student in an American college? Write down a few thoughts here:
2. When you first considered taking ESL classes at Grossmont College, whom did you talk to before you registered for classes? List some of the people you had talked to:
3. Since you began your education in the U.S., what kinds of assignments have you done in your classes? List at least 3 different assignments (writing, reading, listening and speaking, and other classes).
4. Compared to assignments in classes that you took in high school and college/university in your home country, are assignments at Grossmont College that you have done so far similar or different? In what ways?

Comprehension and Vocabulary Questions:

Before you begin reading, number the paragraphs in the text. Check with your partner to see if you agree.

❖ **Read the first 4 paragraphs of the text and answer the following questions:**

1. Who is Ladya Cheryl?

2. How did Ladya Cheryl feel before the assignment?

3. How did she feel after she completed the assignment?

4. Based on your answers to the above questions, the meaning of the word **apprehensive** is closest to (Par. 1):
 - a. Excited
 - b. Scared
 - c. Upset
 - d. Worried


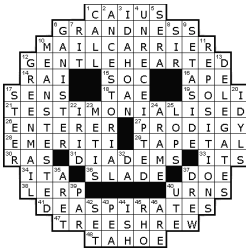

5. Based on you answers to the above questions, the meaning of the word **empowered** is closest to (Par. 2):
 - a. Confident
 - b. Unprepared
 - c. Physically strong
 - d. Powerless




❖ **Read paragraphs 5-8 and answer the following questions:**

6. What is PBL?
7. What kinds of projects did the ESL students create? List some:
- a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
8. Who is Tamara Kirson?
9. According to Tamara Kirson, how can assignments like PBL increase the success of ESL students?
10. According to Cheryl, what was the unexpected benefit of working on a PBL project?
11. Based on your answers to the above questions, what would be a synonym to these verbs? (Par. 5):
- a. **build up** _____
 - b. **break down** _____
12. Read the first sentence of paragraph 7. What do you think the phrase **a variety of projects** means? Circle the correct answer.
- a. The projects were difficult
 - b. The projects were very educational
 - c. There were many different kinds of projects
 - d. The projects were artistic and interesting

- ❖ Read paragraphs 9-10 and fill in the missing information for each project described in the blog. The first line is an example based on the information from paragraphs 1-7.

13. Fill in the missing information from the text.

Genre (type of project)	Title of the project	Teacher/ Class
A guide to restaurants	Open Sesame	Tamara Kirson (listening-speaking)
Board games 	The Game Gathering	
	Crossroads and Crosswords	
A podcast 		Michelle Kaplan (high-intermediate listening-speaking)
	United Symphony	

		
<p>Online magazines</p>		
	<p>X</p>	<p>Roshii Jolly (listening-speaking)</p>

14. Go to the online version of this article:

<https://blogs.newschool.edu/news/2017/02/for-esl-students-project-based-learning-build-up-confidence-breaks-down-inhibitions/>

- ❖ **Click on each of the four videos embedded in the article and for each video describe what project it illustrates (use information from the table above to help you):**

Link #1:

Link #2:

Link #3:

Link #4:

❖ **The following questions are about the concluding paragraphs (par. 11-12).**

15. The first two sentences of paragraph 11 are connected with a transition **however**. This connector is used to show contrast between two sentences. Which of the following paraphrases of the first two sentences is closest to the original? Circle all that apply.

- a) PBL assignments may vary in genre, but they all have several elements in common.
- b) Although PBL assignments may be different in genre, they all share similar characteristics.
- c) PBL assignments may be different in genre because they all share similar features.
- d) All PBL assignments have some required elements even though the final projects might be presented in different genres and may focus on different topics.

16. The last sentence of paragraph 11 begins with a transitional phrase, **what's more**. Which of the following connectors can be used to replace **what's more** in the last sentence? Circle the correct answer.

- a) However
- b) Because
- c) In addition
- d) In conclusion

17. In paragraph 12, the writers use a quote from Cheryl. What is the purpose of this quote? Circle the correct answer.

- a) To define what PBL is.
- b) To give an example of one of the PBL activities.
- c) To give more information about the student.
- d) To explain how PBL helped one student succeed.

After discussing the possible intended audience for this text, write a paragraph summarizing your ideas. You may begin your paragraph with one of the following sentence stems:

The intended audience for this article is _____

People who are most likely to read this blog are _____

The authors created this text for people who _____

Your paragraph:
